Roanoke Couple La. Sniper Victims

ROANOKE, Va., Jan. 8 (AP) —A vacationing Roanoke doctor and his wife were among those killed in the gun battle at a New Orleans hotel.

They were Dr. Robert Vernon Steagall Jr., 28, and Elizabeth Day Steagall, 25.

According to reports from the New Orleans States-Item, the couple was found locked in an embrace in a hallway of the 18th floor of the embattled Howard Johnson Hotel.

Steagall had been shot in the head and arm and Mrs. Steagall was shot in the right eye.

Three snipers apparently set fires on the upper floors and then took up positions on the roof of the hotel.

The Steagalls left Roanoke on New Year's Day, according to Roanoke Memorial Hospital officials. Steagall, an intern at the hospital, worked Christmas and New Year's weekends to build up a few days to his vacation.

Mrs. Steagall, an audiologist, worked at the Roanoke Valley Speech and Hearing Center.

The couple was married in June and moved to Roanoke in July, when Steagall started his internship. Steagall was a son of Robert Steagall of Martinsville. His wife was from Roxboro, N. C.

In New Orleans, the Steagalls had spent some time with another intern from Roanoke Memorial, Willet J. Hickman III, whose parents live there.

After trying to call the hotel and trying to enter the cordoned-off area in downtown New Orleans, Hickman learned that police had found the burned bodies of two persons in the hotel.

Hickman was shown the bodies and identified them as his friends.

A memorial service for the couple was held today at Roanoke Memorial at 12:15 p.m.

Steagall had planned to go into family practice, probably in the Martinsville area where he grew up, according to Dr. Charles L. Crockett, director of medical education at Roanoke Memorial.

Steagall was graduated from Martinsville High School in 1963 and then went to the University of Virginia. He received a B.A. degree in 1967 and an M.D. from the University of Virginia Medical School in 1972. He had worked briefly for the Martinsville Bulletin.

Steagall was born in Pensacola, Fla.

Mrs. Steagall, received an A.B. degree from Greensboro College in 1969 and an M.A. in audiology from the University of Virginia in 1972.

Steagall's record in school and as an intern was "nothing but top-notch," according to William H. Flannagan, director of Roanoke Memorial.

Students who knew him called him dedicated and serious. "He and his wife were the sort of people you don't meet very often. They really cared about their patients," said another intern who lived next door to the couple.